

LINCOLN COUNTY FAIR HISTORY LARIMER AND LINCOLN COUNTIES

PROJECT INTRODUCTION

The Lincoln County Free Fair and Rodeo is an integral summer event that lets community members celebrate the year's agricultural and community achievements together. This internship was designed to discover more about the fair and its impacts on the community over time. I did this through oral history interviews and archival research, which in the context of the internship served as a document review and qualitative interview data collection.

The fair's history is relatively undocumented, so newspapers were my primary source for information, in both online and in-person archives. I interviewed local stakeholders who have been involved with the fair and asked them questions about the fair that focused on their lived experiences with the event over time.

The final part of my experience was creating an exhibit for the Lincoln County Fair as an opportunity to share what I learned with fair attendees. I also brainstormed ideas for a painted mural to document and celebrate the fair throughout the years that will be painted in the next year.

This internship provided opportunities for me to practice and refine my research skills, learn how to conduct oral histories, and learn how to format and create final transcripts of those interviews.

INTERNSHIP GOALS

- Analyze historical documents about the county fair and its impacts on Lincoln County.
- Interview, compile, and analyze interviews from local stakeholders to describe the fair and its impacts on community members in Lincoln County.
- Assist and experience the planning, preparation, and execution of the Lincoln County Fair to have contextual experience with the fair.

APPLICATION

As a graduate student studying U.S. history and public history, this internship allowed me to gain practical experience in the field. I honed my archival research skills, practiced preparing for and conducting oral history interviews, and worked with community members to help tell the story of this important community event.

ORAL HISTORY PROCESS

Pre-Interview: This stage consisted of what I could learn about the Lincoln County Fair through archival research. I consulted Colorado Historic Newspapers' online collection and the Stephen H. Hart Research Center at History Colorado. This work helped me prepare meaningful interview questions for the local community.

Interview: In June and July, I traveled throughout Lincoln County to interview people with longstanding connections with the fair, including a former Extension agent and the second-ever County Fair Queen. I asked them what changes to the fair they had noticed over time, their memories of the fair, and their thoughts on its future in the county.

Post-Interview: I worked on creating and editing transcripts of the interviews, creating a log of ephemera photos I took, and brainstorming mural ideas. I also attended the fair in August and made an exhibit to present my work.

Archival and Publication: The full interviews, transcripts, and ephemera photos will be freely available online in CSU Libraries' Mountain Scholar collections.



Oral history interviewee Doug Blackwelder and his 1967 Champion Showmanship trophy.



Lincoln County Fair Rodeo 2023, courtesy of Dustin Price Photography

EPHEMERA PHOTOS



Left Photo: Marie Palmer with an outfit she made circa 1950s.



Right Photo: Shadowbox at Lincoln County Courthouse displaying ribbons Eula Fisher won.

WHAT YOU LEARNED

Recording and preserving local histories is just as important as recording and preserving state and national histories. While the Lincoln County Fair may not be nationally significant, my interviews with community members showed how significant the fair is to them, their families, and the rest of the county. A theme that came up in each of my interviews was community – many interviewees discussed the importance of the fair as a social gathering because they get to see people they normally only saw annually at the fair. Towns in Lincoln County are spread out and the fair serves as a county-wide forum for people to reminisce, support the 4-H youth, and be together as a community. Many of the people I interviewed have children who participated in 4-H and showed at their fair, and now many of their grandchildren have continued that tradition, making it a multigenerational event.

This event is important to the people of Lincoln County and has happened annually since 1907 (with the exception of 1941-1946), but it is not represented in the local museums. My hope is to work with those organizations to ensure the preservation of this history so they can make a meaningful display for locals and tourists alike to appreciate the fair's rich history in Lincoln County.

NEXT STEPS

The time constraints of this project limited my ability to conduct thorough archival research of the fair, and many of my interviewees were in the same age range. I hope a future intern could build on this history by conducting further research in the archives and interviewing younger members of the community to gain more diverse perspectives of the fair and its impact in the county.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to History Colorado's archivists at the Stephen H. Hart Research Center for compiling sources for me to examine.

Thank you to the interview participants: Doug and Rhonda Blackwelder, Juana Hajek, Pete Kjosness, Frances Maskus, Marie Palmer, Mary Simmons, Nola Stone, Rayleene Thompson, Jeff and Tammy Thornton, and Harold and Linda Yoder.

Thank you to Nyal and Gillian at the Red Brick on Main Airbnb in Hugo for their hospitality during my 3 stays in the area.